DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 493 CG 031 367

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TITLE Experiential Teaching Strategies Applied to an Ethics and Professional Issues Course.
PUB DATE 2001-08-00
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (109th, San Francisco, CA, August 24-28, 2001).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counseling; *Counselor Training; Curriculum; *Ethics; *Experiential Learning; Graduate Students; Higher Education; Lesson Plans; Self Evaluation (Individuals)

ABSTRACT

Effective ethics training requires more than being knowledgeable about the code of ethics. Ethical decision-making requires higher order cognitive skills and an examination of personal values. Didactic course work establishes a foundation, but it must be supplemented with experiential activities that will provide the student with first-hand experience with ethical dilemmas, and by classroom discussions that expand cognitive awareness. It is important for students to have first-hand experience in working with contemporary ethical issues before they finish their graduate training. While ethical vignettes are one way to simulate clinical contexts, real life examples that place students in situations where they will personally experience ethical issues is recommended. Nine experiential teaching strategies that are appropriate for an ethics and professional issues course are discussed. Some suggestions include students completing a family genogram; developing a professional disclosure brochure; researching ethical decision-making models; and participating in a professional growth group. (Contains 11 references.) (JDM)

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Running head: EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING STRATEGIES

Experiential Teaching Strategies Applied to an Ethics and Professional Issues Course

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Experiential Teaching Strategies Applied to a Counseling Ethics and Professional Issues Course

Effective ethics training requires more than being knowledgeable about the code of ethics (Brown & Lent, 1992; Agresti, 1992; Herlihy & Golden, 1990). Ethical decision-making requires higher order cognitive skills and an examination of personal values. Didactic course work establishes a foundation, but it must be supplemented with experiential activities that will provide the student with first-hand experience with ethical dilemmas and by classroom discussions that expand cognitive awareness. Ethical responsiveness requires the integration of knowledge of the code with critical thinking and reasoning combined with the fortitude to act. Academic courses have been criticized for being too removed from the realities of clinical practice. While ethical vignettes are an excellent way to simulate clinical contexts, real life examples that place students in situations where they will personally experience ethical issues are recommended. Nine experiential teaching strategies that are appropriate for an ethics and professional issue course are discussed.

Experiential Teaching Strategies

1.Students Complete the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) (Forsyth, 1980). The EPQ is a 20-item paper and pencil scale, with ten items measuring idealism and 10 items measuring relativism. Students self-score their responses and are provided with descriptions of the four ethical ideologies that can influence decision-making: situationalism, absolutism, subjectivism, and exceptionalism.

2. Students Complete a Family Genogram

McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) described the genogram as a graphic presentation of family relationships over three generations. They reported that genograms help individuals learn more about themselves, their values, their worldview, and how their history has impacted identity. Goodman and Carpenter-White (1996) discussed several ethical issues that are relevant to the use of the genogram: student privacy, self-disclosure about family of origin, dual relationships, concerns about evaluation of the assignment, choice associated with the assignment, and possible referral for counseling. The class also should discuss confidentiality in reference to personal disclosures that may occur during class discussion (Pierce & Baldwin, 1990). There may also be cultural implications related to sharing information about family members.

3.Students Complete a Curriculum Vita.

Zuckerman (1997) discussed ethical and legal issues related to accurate self-presentation.

4.Students Develop a Professional Disclosure Brochure.

This assignment requires students to address ethical, legal, and business issues in concise and understandable language.

5.Students Develop a Practice Profile Summary Letter (Browning & Browning, 1993).

Students draft a cover letter to a managed care organization in which they market themselves and request a provider application. It is important that students have exposure to managed care practices prior to graduation.

6. Students Research Ethical Decision-Making Models.

Carter, Bennet, Jones, and Nagy (1994) discussed the importance of having a systematic method for analyzing ethical situations and generating alternative courses of action.

7. Students Develop a Vignette That Illustrates an Ethical Dilemma.

Students are required to develop two vignettes, one that addresses an academic context, such as dual relationships, impaired students, supervision, publication credit, and one that addresses clinical practice. Students use their decision-making model to illustrate the course of action they will take. Students are also required to consult about the dilemma with a peer and with a professional. Students chair class discussion, which leads peers through the ethical decision-making process.

8. Students Develop a Research Proposal On An Ethical/Professional Issue.

Students are asked to investigate the research literature on ethical and professional issues so as to design a research study. Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold (1992) provided a description of topics that should be included in a research proposal. Students are required to complete the university human subjects form and to develop an informed consent statement for participants that discusses confidentiality and the use of the results. This assignment places students in the role of a researcher and highlights ethical issues associated with conducting research.

9. Students Participate In A Professional Growth Group

A professional growth group is a structured lab experience for master's students that is co-lead by doctoral students. The course instructor is only provided with information about student attendance and a non-faculty member provides supervision. Participation

in the group involves assigned weekly readings on professional issues such as choosing a theoretical orientation, cultural diversity, values, transference and countertransference, group process, etc. as well as skill readings related to self-expression, such as self-disclosure, feedback, and confrontation. Participation in this experience raises issues of confidentiality, dual relationships, and impaired students.

Summary

It is important that students have first-hand experience in working with contemporary ethical issues before they finish their graduate training. Ethical and professional issue courses provide an excellent laboratory for creating experiences that require students to experience dilemmas first-hand and to develop solutions. Experiential exercises provide an opportunity for students to debate ethical issues and to struggle with the weight of making ethical decisions within the safety of the classroom before facing them in clinical practice.

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